

Thoughts on My Research Problem

I am the principal of a small elementary (K-5) charter school in Florida. The school was the first of its kind in the county, and enjoys a history of success, including being ranked as an A school for the past five years, high scores on the standardized state FCAT tests, and having an enrollment waiting list for every grade level. With all of those accolades, teachers, parents, and I (administrator) feel we could do more, we are not as great in action as the scores indicate, and we are ready to explore research-based ideas to launch us to excellence.

Sergiovanni reminds us that “the educational leader assumes the role of ‘clinical practitioner’, bringing expert professional knowledge and bearing as they relate to teaching effectiveness, educational program development, and clinical supervision”. The leader becomes responsible, therefore, for diagnosing problems, counseling teachers, and providing staff development.

After one academic year with my small but experienced, devoted, and knowledgeable staff, it has become apparent from my inside view that our school borders on excellence but has not achieved that distinction. In examining why not, I noted the following points:

- Writing at every grade level, while acceptable by state standards, is far below my and the teachers’ expectations;
- Students exhibit an extreme disability of transference: being able to take information learned in one context and applying it in another context (fragile vs. robust learners, Lorrie Shephard, 2000).
- The teachers try to use formative assessment techniques **for** learning. They most often utilize objective-type quizzes and tests summative assessments **of** learning. In discussing this issue, the teachers feel they lack training and information to conduct effective formative assessment;
- Our mission states that we integrate the Arts into and through the curriculum, and yet there is a lack of communication between the classroom teachers and the arts teachers so that this integration can happen;
- The community connections to the school need significant improvement.

Based on these observations, and after open forums with teachers, parents, and the Board of Directors, we are in agreement that we should examine our current situation and evaluate how we could improve the school in as many areas as possible for the ultimate goal of improving student achievement.

